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## 1917-1927: Russian Film between the Old and the New: Genres, Narratives and Bodies

*1917-1927: Films russes entre l'ancien et le nouveau : genres, récits et corps*

**Oksana Bulgakowa**

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Revue des études slaves

## 1917-1927: RUSSIAN FILM BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW GENRES, NARRATIVES, AND BODIES

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In fact, we know well the pre-1917 Russian cinema, which was euphorically celebrated as a true discovery in the 1989 retrospective “*Giornate del cinema muto*” in Pordenone,<sup>1</sup> and the Soviet avant-garde (Dziga Vertov, Lev Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin), which is already ‘too familiar’ anyway. The films made ‘in between’ (1917-1924) have hardly been noticed. These were works that represent an extended farewell to the Russian film and a hesitant approach to the possible template for Soviet cinema—and very little research has been done about this period.<sup>2</sup>

The situation in the film business was extremely chaotic and unstable.

After the October Revolution film entrepreneurs entered a realm of total and ambivalent freedom: until March 1918 there was no censorship and taxes were not collected. However, there was not enough electricity to run the movie theaters and to shoot films, so almost all studios were forced to cease their work in the winter, between November 1917 and February 1918. Three of the more successful pre-revolutionary film producers—Alexander Khanzhonkov, Iosef Ermoliev, and Dmitri Kharitonov—managed to emigrate to Western Europe by way of the Crimea (Yalta) and Odessa, taking with them not only most of the available studio equipment, film stock, prints and even archives of film negatives, but also their creative and technical staff: directors, cameramen, set and costume designers, executive producers, and stars.

1. *Silent Witnesses : Russian Films 1908-1919*, Yury Tsivian (ed.) et al., Pordenone, Biblioteca dell’Imagine, 1989.

2. Viktor Listov has studied the transformation of the private film industry in Russia into a state structure. Listov, *Россия, Революция, Кинематограф*, Moscow, Materik, 1995. Several valuable volumes documenting this process have been published : *История отечественного кино : Документы. Мемуары. Письма*, V. Listov, Ekaterina Hoxlova (eds.), Moskva, Materik, 1996 ; *Кино : организация управления и власть. 1917-1938 гг. : Документы*, Alexandra Evstigneeva (ed.), Moskva, ROSSPEN 2016, p. 20-337. Cf. also Irina Graščenkova, Valerii Fomin (eds.), *Новейшая история российской кинематографии : 1896-1940*, Moskva, Kanon+, 2013, p. 148-183.

What remained in Russia? Not very much. The Skobelev film committee, founded in 1914, to secure reporting on the front continued to film political events even after 1918, as did some smaller film companies such as “Pegasus”, “Neptune”, and “Rus”. In March 1918, in Moscow and Petrograd, the People’s Commissariat of Education set up a film commission (also referred to later as a film committee), in which both Lev Kuleshov and Dziga Vertov began their work. The Commissariat intended for the Skobelev Committee to film events impartially. However, the commission had to solve not only ideological problems, but first of all to clarify the situation with the supply of electrical current and film stock. Russia did not produce its own film stock until 1931. The economic blockade made foreign purchases difficult; these ran mostly through middlemen like the Russian producer of German origin, Paul Tiemann.

In 1917, 337 films were made in Russia; in 1918, there were only six. However, as early as 1919, fifty-seven films were produced, twenty of them, in private studios and another twenty-three in white Crimea. In 1920 there were twenty-nine; in 1921, twelve; and in 1922, sixteen films followed. In 1919, all cinematography was nationalized by a decree, but the movie theaters remained private. Private-release companies were prohibited, but in reality distribution functioned only thanks to private companies. There were no private studios on paper, but what was produced was shot *de facto* in former private studios—and on behalf of the film committee that supported the production of propaganda films called *agitkas*. In 1918 there were three, in 1919—forty, in 1920—twenty-one, in 1921—seven; in 1922—three.<sup>3</sup>

In 1921, after the hunger catastrophe on the Volga, the revolt in Kronstadt, and a general economic collapse in the cities, the New Economic Policy was introduced, which meant a restoration of private companies in the film industry too, but this did not immediately lead to a boom in film production. In 1922, a state-owned institution, Goskino, was founded and received a tax monopoly in order to produce revenue enough to secure the ongoing production of films (the taxes were very high: 30% per film ticket; only in 1924 they were reduced to 10%). In 1922, the first state-run film studios produced eight films in Petrograd, and in 1923, five were in Moscow (with a total production of twenty-eight).

Most of the films made during the first seven years of Soviet rule have not survived, due to the lack of film stock for prints; a few were printed several years after they were first made, as was the case with *Polikushka*, which was shot in 1919, yet released only in 1922. Due to the limited opportunities to import film stock from abroad, Soviet film technicians developed a complicated method of “rinsing off” old films and treating the celluloid with new emulsion. There is no way to know how effective this particular method was, but the

3. All these numbers are referenced from : Veniamin Višnevskij, *Художественные фильмы дореволюционной России*, Moskva, Goskinoizdat, 1945 ; *Советские художественные фильмы*, vol. 1, Moskva, Iskusstvo, 1961.

Soviet cinema immediately established itself as a palimpsest of pre-revolutionary film on many other levels.

#### THE OLD AS THE NEW

In this interval, three types of films were produced: 1) traditional pre-revolutionary melodramas with slight corrections that were attacked by the leftist critics as ideological pornography; 2) propaganda films; and 3) laboratory experiments with new forms made mostly outside the film business—in the theater (Eisenstein) or in film school (Kuleshov).

In its aesthetic, the first type was based on a peculiar anachronism preferred by pre-revolutionary cinema. Russian artistic achievements of the late nineteenth century (Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's novels, the *peredvizhnik* naturalist school of painting, the psychological acting style explored by the Maly Theatre and refined in Konstantin Stanislavsky's Art Theatre) were co-opted by film and presented as the pinnacles of twentieth-century art. Specifically, this resulted in slow-moving narrative; the conscious rejection of montage (Russian actors of the period perfected the singular method of explicitly showing the passage from one state to another, while montage strives toward elliptical abbreviation<sup>4</sup>). Long shots dominated over the close up and sets were cluttered with various everyday objects and furniture. All of this rendered the overall composition more theatrical than cinematographic. These peculiarities contradicted the essential poetics of the new medium—dynamism, simultaneous action, ruptured connections, random action, the primacy of fragments over the whole.

One fact testifies to how popular this old-style cinema was: in 1922, one of the first foreign films from Josef Yermoliev's French production (shot in Paris and Nice) with pre-revolutionary stars Ivan Moszhukhin and Natalia Lisenko, *The Child of the Carnival*, was released in Soviet Russia and became a blockbuster. The first film magazine released after a four-year break<sup>5</sup> pictured on its cover the most popular actress of Russian prerevolutionary cinema, Vera Kholodnaia, who had died in 1919 in Odessa during the Spanish flu epidemic.

The first Soviet films imitated the forms of the Russian cinema, from plot (for example, the love triangle that ends in death) and set design to acting style and montage.

In 1922, Alexander Panteleev (who, in 1919, had made the first Soviet propaganda film, *The Miracle-Worker* and been praised by Lenin), shot a tried-and-true Russian melodrama entitled *There is No Happiness on Earth*. The husband has no money, but does have tuberculosis, and his pretty young wife is easily

4. Yuri Tsivian, "Early Russian Cinema: Some Observations," *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, R. Taylor, I. Christie (eds.), London – New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 7-30.

5. The film periodicals that were published before 1917, were all discontinued in 1918 and resumed only in 1922.

seduced by his rich friend. After the radical reforms in family law passed in 1918 divorce no longer posed any legal problems, but still could not be the subject of a film. Thus, the husband commits suicide and the wife goes insane. The profound and deeply rooted pessimism of traditional Russian film was not shaken by the revolution. Panteleev even saved the interior design from old sets (a yacht or a boudoir with bronzed mirrors and champagne for the traditional seduction scene, a petty bourgeois parlor for the family scenes). Only a few inconsequential details refer to the new reality: instead of a bank, the husband works at the Smolny (Bolshevik headquarters); the seducer is an émigré who returns to Petrograd with an American passport and dollars.

Even more incredible is the retention of Russian film's traditional allegorical forms—a fatalistic historical philosophy far from Karl Marx's class doctrine. The revolutionary unrest was thus interpreted as the effect of mystical forces, indeed the arrival of the Antichrist.

Vladimir Gardin's historical allegory of the revolution, with its title *A Spectre Haunts Europe* (1923) inspired by Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, is actually a retelling of Edgar Allan Poe's gothic horror story *The Masque of the Red Death*. The turbulence of the revolution is ascribed to mystical forces, as the results of plague, as an outraged father's personal vengeance for his daughter's seduction and ruin, etc. Moreover, after the exquisite, very expensive films with their astonishing lighting designs, such as those made by Evgenii Bauer, the *agitkas* had perplexed audiences with their "naked pictures" and badly lit images—but in 1923 the grand old style celebrated a comeback with Gardin. His productions employed the same location motifs, props, recognizable furniture, and costumes as Bauer had used in his 1916 film *The King of Paris*, which had been shot in Crimea!

Proletarians (disguised as picturesque bandits—sometimes appearing as phantoms in the double exposure) slip into the role of mystical destiny, the revolution takes the place of the plague and drives the beautiful monarch and his decadent ladies into a self-chosen exile in a castle (also known from Bauer's film *The Dying Swan*, 1916), where wild orgies are held. Bauer's cameraman Boris Zavel'ev shot the story with pre-revolutionary stars Zoia Barantsevich and Oleg Freilich. In the middle of this "old" new film, suddenly the staircase appears as a shelter from a massacre—and this, two years before Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin!*

Cheslav Sabinsky's *agitka* *Father Vasily the Filthy* (1924) mocked the traditional saga of a saint's life with antireligious subtitles. But without these subtitles the film could easily be perceived as a *moralité* about a repentant sinner, especially since it imitated the psychological naturalism of the film *Father Sergy* (directed by Iakov Protazanov in 1917).

This kind of *vitae* disappeared from the repertoire of revolutionary film, historical allegories and mournful melodramas were sharply attacked. *Polikushka*

(from 1919, made by Alexander Sanin) and later *The Stationmaster* (from 1925, directed by Yuri Zheliabushski)—both with Ivan Moskvina—celebrated great success in Europe. What was seen abroad as a model of authentic Russian film had been condemned at home as reactionary and traditional. Other forms had to be discovered. Agitkas, for example, could also be made as slapsticks and commercials as the Factory of Eccentric Actors declared and demonstrated in its production *The Adventures of Oktiabrina* (1925).

Seven years after the Revolution, Soviet critics began to catch on that there was no *new* Soviet cinema to speak of and demanded that the Bolshevik party undertake decisive measures regarding the politics of financing filmmaking and the taxation of movie theatres.<sup>6</sup> Various members of the avant-garde also demanded radical reforms. In 1924, Goskino was replaced by a new organization, Sovkino, that became the state subsidies – and Vertov, Kuleshov, and Eisenstein all released full-length pictures what could be seen as the birth of a new Soviet film.

Vertov developed his models of dynamic geometry and the kino-eye, which were based on a total rejection of the mimetic, psychological, or eccentric “theatre-as-film,” emphasizing the immanent freedom of the camera, which had the ability to see what the human eye could not. Kuleshov had started as a set designer working on films with Evgenii Bauer but almost parodied the expressive beauty of Bauer’s films in his “bare” shots—the objects and set decorations were all markedly geometric in shape, contours and textures were permeated with light, the background was neutral, the props were carefully chosen and their number deliberately limited. The natural environment in Russia, its “motley peacock slush,” was not photogenic enough for film, according to the director<sup>7</sup>. The only things to possess this photogenic quality were specific architectural structures (for example, railroad bridges and skyscrapers, due to their immediately perceivable geometric form) and dynamic objects (cars, locomotives, airplanes, motorcycles)<sup>8</sup>. The most cinematographic of all were the specially synchronized movements of the actors, trained in a specific method which Kuleshov termed “naturism.” Kuleshov’s *naturshshiks* could create cinematic motion which had nothing to do with chaotic day-to-day gestures and could exercise complete control over their bodies, the ultimate machine. But at the same time, Kuleshov and

6. “Declaration of the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography” (1924) in : Christie, Taylor (eds.), *Film Factory : Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents : 1896-1939*, London – New York, Routledge, 1988, p. 103 ; “Resolution of the Thirteenth Party Congress on Cinema”, in : *ibid.*, p. 111.

7. Lev Kulešov, “Наш Быт и Американским”, in : Kulešov, *Собрание сочинений в трех томах*, vol. 1 : *Теория. Педагогика. Критика*, Aleksandra Hoxlova, Ekaterina Hoxlova and I. Sosnovskij (eds.), Moskva, Iskusstvo, 1987, p. 93.

8. The average length of one shot in Bauer’s film *Mute Witnesses* (1914) was, according to Yuri Tsivian’s count, about one minute—six times longer than in American motion pictures of this time. The average length of a shot in Kuleshov’s first film, *The Project of Engineer Prite* (1918) was six seconds, which was one and a half times faster. Tsivian, “Cutting and Framing in Bauer’s and Kuleshov’s Films”, *Kintop 1: Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des Frühen Films*, Frankfurt, 1992, p. 103-113.

his pupils—Vsevolod Pudovkin, Boris Barnet, Sergei Komarov, Sergei Eisenstein—deconstructed the old body language and the manner of its filmic presentation.

#### DECONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST

The Russian Revolution followed in the steps of the French Revolution in terms of its strategy of representation. When the old symbolic system collapsed, the body had to be filled with a new meaning, equipped with new bodily techniques, and represented in a renewed canon. The bodies belonging to the past (aristocrats, bourgeoisie, military figures, *belles dames*) were revealed to be in a state of decay: they were addicted to sex, gluttony, and debauchery. The problem for post-revolutionary film, however, was that the bodies of the former stars of pre-revolutionary films still retained this status after the revolution. The productions of Russian émigrés in France featuring these stars were still very successful when released in Soviet Russia. Therefore, Soviet film created an ambivalent image of the former elite that was attractive and repulsive at the same time. Often, however, the elite appeared as a grotesque caricature. The attractive artists seldom acted as romantic lovers and when they did so, it was only in a lightly distorted representation, so that their desirable bodies were turned into parody.

The earlier aestheticized bodies of the aristocrats—the salon beauties, young princes, officers, high officials—were riddled with physical anomalies and signs of degeneration; they suffer from abnormal motor function and hysterical convulsive movements. They appeared as vampires (*The Bear's Wedding*, 1925, by Konstantin Eggert; *The Bay of Death*, 1926, by Abram Room) or as living corpses: frozen statues, headless coats (*The End of St. Petersburg*, 1927, by Vsevolod Pudovkin). Before 1917 the elite had been shown in the modes of salon communication—sophisticated flirtation, kissing, embracing, dancing, strolling, horseback riding, and fencing—equipped with bodily techniques that required elegance and training. Now, these protagonists were shown exclusively in the sphere of physiological actions. Violent rape replaced choreographed kisses. Before 1917 they drank champagne, now they gnaw on leg of lamb. The gestures of this social group – well-educated people with manners—were unmasked on the screen as silly and ridiculous.

This representational strategy was reminiscent of the old social asymmetry, which now seemed to have been overturned. A peculiar exchange of bodily costumes takes place that resembles the carnival exchange of garments between the king and the slave. In the past, servants would fuss about, now the former masters do. The body language and gestures of young, elegant actresses were transposed onto the awkward bodies of fat women. The speed of the execution of movement changed too: instead of gliding movements the actors struck staccato beats.

In the comedy *The Girl with a Hat Box* (1927), Boris Barnet demonstrated a grotesque parody of decadent beauty with the help of Serafima Birman, who played the role of the hat workshop owner, Madame Irene. He used the well-known seductive body parts from pre-revolutionary film: naked ankles and the graceful wrist. Evgenii Bauer, too, had emphasized these body parts in his depiction of film beauty, using the delicate movements of their fingers and hands to expose their graceful gestures. Madame Irene's first appearance in the film is skillfully staged with an effective display of her half-revealed leg in the silk stockings. But montage destroyed this decadent coquette. The shot of her delicate ankles is followed by a close-up of an asymmetrical and hideous face, ruining the erotic charge that would have made the old body recognizable, immediately deconstructing it instead. With the character's graceful hands, Barnet went the same way: Birman's gracefully turned-out wrist – just like the wrists of Bauer's actresses—is parodied by a fat comedian played by Pavel Pol, whose obese hands, shot in close-up, unsuccessfully attempt to imitate the flowing movement. This travesty of sex (from the slender woman to the fat man) produces the initial shift toward caricature, but the gesture becomes even more parodied, as the man goes on to make a fist, followed by a fig sign. The asemantic movement of a woman has been transformed into a sign of aggressive threat and vulgar insult.

In *A Kiss From Mary Pickford* (1927, by Sergei Komarov), a girl who dreams of becoming an actress gives a dilettante's rendition of the sinuous motions of Vera Kholodnaia. This scene parodies not only the girl's lack of talent, but also the decadent gesticulations themselves.

In *Chess Fever* (1925, by Vsevolod Pudovkin and Nikolai Shpikovskii) a lady is presented in the typical feminine pose of the Silver Age—half-reclining. The immobility and erotically slow motion of the femme fatale, however, is interrupted here by the paroxysm of a hysterical fit.

In Kuleshov's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924) the extremely slender Alexandra Khokhlova transcribes the old techniques of seduction into a machine-like rhythm by raising and lowering her randomly revealed 'constructivist' shoulder as if she were performing simple gymnastic exercises. A languidly strolling beauty, winds up taking a clown-like fall: the *belle dame* lands on her stomach and pulls her legs upwards just as the red-haired clown does in the circus (the gag was also executed by a man). In Eisenstein's *Strike* (1924), the erotic dance sensation of 1913, the tango, is performed by two dwarfs.

But the same technique of inversion can also be observed in the representation of new heroes, new masters, peasants, and workers. As the Revolution disturbed social norms and traditions, Soviet society experienced a radical change in its gestural code. Uncouth behavior was affirmed as a way to identify the new class and the new norms of a more democratic society and thereby giving another



blow to “good manners.” In pre-revolutionary films, peasants spit, belch, cough up phlegm, wipe their noses on their hands and sleeves as they please. Earlier, this behavior had been a sign of an uneducated, underprivileged social class. Now, the abolition of gestural restraints was interpreted as the liberation of the natural man, and “bad manners” were re-evaluated as socially acceptable manners. Some bodily techniques that had been contained within private space—like washing and calisthenics—were now accepted in the public sphere, while some gestures from the public sphere were transmitted into a very private setting. Handkerchiefs disappear. Male and female protagonists scratch their ears, pick their noses and adjust their pants or shirts. They slap each other in the rear and poke each other in the stomach. Vulgar manners and vulgar speech were adopted by intellectuals in positions of power and by young, graceful actresses of aristocratic descent (a detail that adds an element of coquettish stylization to this representational trend); this was contrasted by the refined bodily techniques of the old elite, which were represented as vulgar and ridiculous. Anna Sten and Ivan Koval-Samborsky demonstrate the new bodily costume with efficiency and rhythmic precision in Barnet’s comedy *The Girl with a Hat Box*.

The new beauty (Sten) does not move slowly and gracefully, but quickly and gracefully. While Birman and Paul—two caricatures—are branded by an overproduction of hasty movements, as an example of pathological hysterical dynamics, Sten’s fast, syncopated steps mark the energy of a young and healthy body. Her way of walking is determined not by tango but by foxtrot, a “school of mechanized step, which combines the sliding rotation of the foot [...] with a sudden acceleration, a machine-like exactness” (Valentin Parnakh)<sup>9</sup> Sten’s jumps, accelerated by the changed speed of the camera, just as in slapstick, could produce an multiivalent effect, otherwise the infantile grace of the young actress would not be so enchanting.

Koval-Samborsky plays a peasant from a Siberian village, and the actor provides him with a whole set of folkloric gestures. He rubs his ears and nose, scratches his neck, waddles as he walks, and stands like an idiot with inverted feet—just as it had been played in the theater of the eighteenth century. He is also infantilized: in a scene where he performs athletic movements, he is made to crawl on the floor like a toddler, because there is no furniture in the room. On the other hand, he is already a new person who devotes a lot of time to healthy body care (calisthenics, washing). The handsome Koval-Samborsky used to play romantic lovers and became famous in Meyerhold’s biomechanical production of Ostrovsky’s *Forest* (1923). Framed this way, the instruction on bodily hygiene—when the actor has only his sports pants on—function like a provocative demonstration of an attractive, almost naked male body.

Anna Sten is given the active part in the romance, and Koval-Samborsky becomes the passive object of her desire. For this reason, he is equipped with

9. Valentin Parnakh, “Новые танцы,” in *Вещь* 1-2 (1922), p. 25.

female techniques of erotic seduction. Koval-Samborsky imitates Chaplin's duck-walk and his huge boots. But since Koval-Samborsky is an athlete with long, slender legs, this exaggerated gait turns the viewers' attention to his legs, and the director makes an erotic object out of male feet. This 'fetish' is presented in close ups but placed into comic situations: his feet and legs are awkward instruments. The hero falls, makes others fall, and smashes fragile objects. His huge feet, in felt boots, dangle from the upper bunk in a railroad wagon and bother Anna Sten, who sits below. In an attempt not to bother the girl, the man climbs down, but immediately crushes her hat box.

Anna Sten and Ivan Koval-Samborsky would make films abroad, and their star qualities were recognized by both UFA and Hollywood: Sten was later contracted by MGM and Koval-Samborsky played in many German films. However, neither continued to act in comedies but played only romantic roles.

### THE NEW

Since Soviet cinema had not only to fit into but also to create a new social model, it made use of very eclectic sources for this new construct: rhetorical gestures of political leaders, symbolic gestures of the imperial code, eloquent gestures from theatrical melodrama, vulgar gestures of the common people (taken from vaudeville), ritual folklore gestures of Russian peasants (as preserved in Russian prerevolutionary film), the body language of American film stars, athletic culture, Taylorism, etc.<sup>10</sup> But at the same time the directors proposed utopian, sometimes contradictory models for a new bodily behavior that was meant to be imitated in reality. A new society striving to free itself from old rituals was developing new designs for clothing and living spaces, new standards of perception, and a new body language—for a new anthropological type, a *homo soveticus*, a specific version of a man of modernity. Leon Trotsky wrote in 1923:

Man will become incomparably stronger, smarter, sharper. His body will become more harmonious, his movement more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The average human type will be elevated to the level of Aristotle, Goethe, and Marx. Science will aid in the creation of this higher, social-biological type, this superman—if you like. And the arts will give this process a sublime form.<sup>11</sup>

As the old, everyday rituals and symbols of bodily communication and hierarchy were dismissed, the body had to be returned to nature. Instructions on "what is good and what is bad" often referred to biological techniques. How to wash. How to take a shower. How to brush one's teeth. Cinema instructed people in the elementary techniques of intimate hygiene.

10. I have analyzed this process in my book *Фабрика жестов*, Moskva, NLO, 2005 and in the DVD *Factory of Gestures*, SHL, 2008.

11. Lev Trotskij, *Литература и революция*, Moskva, GIZ, 1924, 2d Ed., p. 193-194.

In the past, these techniques were beyond the limits of representation. But in the twenties heroes wash themselves joyously, exercise, dress and undress in front of the camera and in public.

Vertov films the body as an object of medical observation. Adult bodies are defective: they are damaged by tuberculosis, syphilis, exhaustion, alcoholism, degeneration. There is a limited choice of healthy heroes: children, pioneers who learn the new bodily techniques of hygiene and sports.

But this was not the only habit that had radically changed. The trained, rhythmically organized, military march that appeared in films about the pre-revolutionary time, made in the twenties, was an attribute of the oppressors: remember the march of the soldiers on the Odessa steps in *The Battleship Potemkin*. The ideal synchronization in the movements of their feet—like chorus girls—was coded in the context of the film as part of the emotionless machine of suppression-destruction: the crowd of human victims did not know how to move in such an organized manner. In Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926) the march was also an attribute of a punitive squadron. The revolutionary workers were represented as a chaotic crowd—in juxtaposition with the natural breaking up of a frozen stream. The literature of this time also uses comparisons of crowds of workers or even of a workers' army with natural elements (a waterfall, an avalanche, a flock of birds). That is why in the films of the twenties, we see only children and pioneers marching: in almost all the films of Vertov, in *The Cigarette Girl from Mossel'prom* (1924, by Yuri Zhelyabushky), in *Katka's Reinette Apples* (1926, by Friedrich Ermler). But in the thirties, everybody is marching. The documentary footage of the first parade on Red Square shows soldiers who do not know how to hold proper body stature and position in line: their hands dangle, their backs are not straight. But in the fiction film *Circus* (1936, by Grigory Alexandrov) and in the documentary film *Flourishing Youth* (1939, by Alexander Medvedkin) both actors and the nonprofessional participants of rallies had developed the necessary military order and synchronization of motions (almost like the executioners from *Potemkin*). Films gradually introduced a new gait—an athletic, military gait—as the accepted and suggested prototype. In order to emphasize what sort of gait should be mastered in the process of “civilization,” the director of *The Radiant Path* (1941), the same Alexandrov, filmed a long silent episode that showed black silhouettes against a shining white background so that spectators could examine how the foot starts its step beginning from the toe, how tense the straight posture of the back and of the head are, how long strides ought to be—as done by both female and male protagonists.

Fiction and documentary films actively attempted to “instruct” spectators how to move and how to behave. Peasants in silent films (*Silent Witnesses*, 1916; *Polikushka*, 1919; *Aelita*, 1925) were primarily characterized by constant spitting, but this habit was a mark of their social status and was not ethically evaluated. Even in Alexandrov's *Circus* (1936) the director is always spitting,

and this habit is supposed to give him a touch of vital Russian authenticity. Trotsky, however, in *Problems of Everyday Life* (1923) educates the readers with regard to communism, but simultaneously advises them not to spit and not to throw cigarette butts on the floor. In the 1920s, in parallel to industrial films that showed the correct way to hold a hammer, a whole series of educational films demonstrate how to wash oneself and how to use a shower (*Preserve Your Health*, by Alexander Medvedkin, 1929), how to walk in the city and cross the street (a film by Mikhail Werner, 1925), how to ride in a streetcar or how to live in a hostel. Among these films we can find the title *Do Not Spit on the Floor!* (1930). In Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel *One Day in the life of Ivan Denisovich* (1961), a peasant who arrives at a prison camp toward the end of the war (which means only ten years after the release of this film), notes that Russians had already forgotten how to make a cross—whether with the right or the left hand—but that they all already know that to spit on the floor (even in a very dirty room) is inappropriate. Norbert Elias has observed that the introduction of the handkerchief took two hundred years. Compared with this time-frame, twenty years to educate the population to stop spitting is a record in speed.<sup>12</sup>

12. Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (1939), vol. 2, Bern – München, Franke, 1969, p. 194-208.